

Signs of dehydration checklist

What to look for, what to do and when to get help

Some people can't tell you they're thirsty, so watch for these signs, especially in people living with dementia or communication needs. Always follow the person's care plan.

Service / area

Completed by

Date

Look and ask about

- ☐ Feeling thirsty
- ☐ Dark yellow, strong-smelling pee
- ☐ Peeing less often than usual
- ☐ Feeling dizzy or light-headed
- ☐ Headache
- ☐ Feeling tired
- ☐ A dry mouth, lips and tongue
- ☐ Sunken eyes

Higher risk

- Older people
- Depends on others for fluids
- Diabetes
- Being sick or diarrhoea
- High temperature or heat
- Heavy sweating
- Diuretic medicines
- Too much alcohol

What to do

- Offer and encourage fluids, following the care plan, including thickened drinks where needed.
- If they feel sick, start with small sips and build up gradually.
- Record fluid intake if your service uses fluid charts, and report concerns.

Get urgent help

Urgent GP appointment or NHS 111 if the person is unusually tired, dizzy when standing, has dark pee or is peeing less than usual, or has fast breathing or a fast heartbeat.

Call 999 or go to A&E if someone who is dehydrated has blue, grey, pale or blotchy skin, lips or tongue, feels cold, has difficulty breathing, or is confused or unusually drowsy.

Sources (checked 16 September 2026): NHS: Dehydration (reviewed 1 May 2026).

A quick-reference resource only. Always follow the person's care plan, your organisation's policies and procedures, and current national guidance.

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